

NetMark *plus*

An Expanded Approach to Malaria Prevention



Malaria kills over two million people in Africa each year. Between 300 and 500 million people suffer from malaria, the majority of whom are young children; one out of 20 children in Africa dies of malaria before the age of 5. The primary cause of absenteeism in African schools is malaria. In Uganda for example, on average a child misses 42 days of school, and children under 5 have malaria six times a year. Families spend approximately 20% of their income on malaria treatments and public health institutions spend up to 40% of their budgets on out-patient treatment for malaria. All told, in addition to the human loss and suffering, the disease results in an economic loss of \$3 billion to economies in Africa each year, slowing economic growth by approximately 1.3%.

NetMark is a USAID-funded initiative that aims to increase the availability and use of insecticide treated nets in sub-Saharan Africa. The scope of the project has recently been broadened; it is now known as **NetMarkplus**.

The only proven way that families can effectively prevent malaria is to use insecticide treated nets (ITNs)

ITNs have been shown to decrease severe malaria by 45%, reduce premature births by 42% and cut all-cause child mortality by 17%–63%. By consistently sleeping under an ITN, families can protect themselves from the mosquitoes that bite in the middle of the night—the only ones that cause malaria. Conventional ITNs need retreatment after three washes to remain effective. Longer lasting ITNs are now available that remain effective for 20 washes or more. ITNs are unquestionably the most effective way that families can protect themselves from malaria.

Yet few people in Africa currently own ITNs primarily because they have not been widely available or affordable. WHO estimates an annual need for over 32,000,000 ITNs in order to protect the most at-risk populations in sub-Saharan Africa by 2005. But the cost and logistical challenge of delivering these life-saving products across the continent on a sustainable basis is simply beyond the means of governments, NGOs, international organizations and donors. To reduce this gap between the need to protect vulnerable populations and the capacity to meet that need, RBM has developed a framework for expanding access of ITNs to all in a way that is both equitable and sustainable.

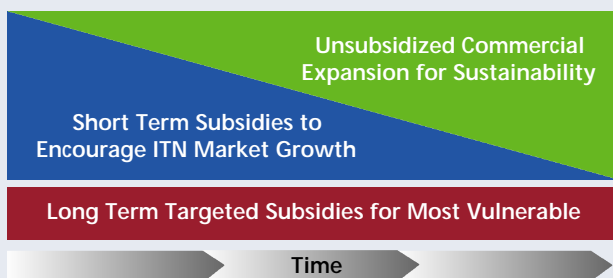
The NetMarkplus approach

NetMarkplus seeks to expand use of ITNs in Africa by supporting all three components of the Roll Back Malaria (RBM) strategic framework for going to scale:

Long Term Targeted Subsidies: For many years to come there will be a large segment of the sub-Saharan population that is at high risk from malaria and too poor to purchase an ITN at any commercial price. NetMark works to ensure that ITNs are available through partial or full subsidies that are *targeted specifically to those who need them* the most. The project supports Ministries of Health, NGOs and donors to expand equity programs. Examples of how NetMark supports targeted subsidy approaches include Senegal and Zambia, where coupons are distributed to pregnant women through public health clinics so they can purchase ITNs from retailers at a discounted price. These activities are carried out in partnership with the Ministries of Health, UNICEF and ExxonMobil.

Short Term Subsidies to Encourage ITN Market Growth: In countries or regions where ITN awareness and acceptance is particularly low and/or commercial activities are very weak, NetMark makes strategic, time-limited investments intended to stimulate interest and use of ITNs among an “early adopter” segment of the population. In addition to stimulating demand for ITNs, this kind of *market priming* effort also introduces local distributors and retailers to ITNs as a potentially viable commercial product; it may even convince a local manufacturer to produce ITNs. For example, the Zambia targeted subsidy activity described above also serves to generate interest in selling ITNs among distributors and retailers. However, market priming efforts must start with an exit strategy already planned so that the servicing of its successful efforts can gradually be shifted to the commercial sector for the long term. NetMark supports market priming interventions in Nigeria by helping to strengthen local manufacturing capacity. The project is also helping to strengthen distribution and retail networks in all target countries.

Unsubsidized Commercial Expansion for Sustainability: In order to assure access of ITNs to all segments of the population *on a sustainable basis*, the participation of the private commercial sector is critical. By engaging the commercial sector in promoting and selling ITNs to those who can afford to pay, the limited resources available from the public sector can then be used to subsidize ITNs for those who truly cannot afford to pay anything. Competition is encouraged among these commercial partners to ensure customer access to higher quality and more affordable products. NetMark supports the efforts of over 15 multi-national and locally based private sector partners in various countries to make ITNs available commercially.



The RBM Strategy for Scaling Up Use of ITNs



Challenges for the Future

There are many challenges NetMark continues to work to overcome. Among the most important are:

Import Taxes and Tariffs: A commercial ITN market based on imported products cannot be developed if import taxes and tariffs result in a price that is beyond the means of most citizens of a country. Of the 44 countries that attended the Abuja Summit on Roll Back Malaria in March 2000, only 17 have actually reduced or eliminated taxes and tariffs on nets and net treatments as agreed to in the Abuja Declaration. The tax and tariff issue is still a major hurdle that NetMark will continue to work on through its own advocacy efforts and through continued collaboration with RBM and African institutions. One approach to minimizing the impact of taxes and tariffs on net availability is to encourage local production of nets. With NetMark's support, commercial partners in Nigeria and Cameroon have committed themselves to locally manufacture high quality nets. In Nigeria these partners have begun branding their products and selling them through retail outlets. NetMark will continue to seek and support opportunities for local production of nets as a way to achieve long term sustainability.

Limited Distribution Capacity: The development of a national ITN market largely depends on the ability of distribution networks to get affordable ITNs to most areas of a country. NetMark's experience has shown that a large number of the "traditional" ITN distributors used by net and insecticide manufacturers are not really in a position to develop a national ITN market for a variety of reasons: lack of financing and staff; limited number of outlets; little experience in large-scale consumer marketing. Importers and retailers are also reluctant to take financial risks to invest in the ITN business. Although NetMark and its partners have worked with distributors to strengthen their capacity, it has become clear that additional distributors with more relevant experience, greater financial strength, and more extensive networks must be brought in as full partners. On a time-limited basis, NetMark supports dedicated sales teams to prime the market for commercial distributors to take over.

While there are clearly major challenges to building sustainable distribution systems for ITNs, experience in Tanzania and Mali suggests that the commercial sector can play a significant role in delivering nets to consumers. Over 50% of households in these countries own a net (insecticide treated or not) that was purchased through retail outlets at commercial prices. The fact that consumers have made the decision to purchase nets in these poor countries with weak infrastructures suggests that the private commercial sector has the potential to be an important partner in the expansion of ITNs in other countries with similar social and economic conditions.

Demand creation continues to be a challenge in most countries. While many people own untreated nets, and in spite of some signs of increased awareness and interest in ITNs, overall use of insecticide treated nets remains very low. The challenge is to convince those at high risk (pregnant women and children) of the unique longer term life-saving benefits of ITNs. Encouraging the most vulnerable populations to use ITNs remains a particular challenge in that these populations are often the hardest to reach. There are also barriers to getting users to consistently re-treat the nets. NetMark is reinforcing its communications activities with less traditional approaches that put greater emphasis on the benefits and comparative value of ITNs in preventing malaria. Retailers represent another target audience for demand creation. They also need to recognize the value of ITNs as a commercial product they want on their shelves.

NetMark collaborates closely with partners in all sectors to address these challenges



NetMark is assisting governments in several countries with the development and implementation of proposals funded by the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The NetMark team is guided by a technical advisory group that includes representatives from CDC, WHO (Geneva and AFRO), UNICEF, and others to ensure that all activities are consistent and coordinated with the broader goals and efforts of RBM.

Currently the project operates in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Zambia, and Uganda. Over the next year, it is likely the project will begin working in Kenya, Cameroon, and Ethiopia.

The **NetMark^{plus}** approach assures that available resources are used in an **equitable, efficient and effective** way that maximizes public health impact for the long term.



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